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Brezhnev, Leonid
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Brezhnev Letter Lists Backfire Assurances

Washington — Political controversy over Carter Administration acceptance of a letter agreement on control of Tupolev Backfire bomber production will center on a document handed to President Jimmy Carter June 16 in Vienna by Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev.

The letter, in full, said:

"The Soviet side informs the U. S. side that the Soviet Tu-22M airplane, called 'Backfire' in the USA, is a medium-range bomber, and that it does not intend to give this airplane the capability of operating at intercontinental distances. In this connection, the Soviet side states that it will not increase the radius of action of this airplane in such a way as to enable it to strike targets on the territory of the USA. Nor does it intend to give it such a capability in any other manner, including by inflight refueling. At the same time, the Soviet side states that it will not increase the production rate of this airplane as compared to the present rate."

U. S. intelligence officials have for some time pegged Backfire production at 30 aircraft per year, and President Brezhnev finally confirmed this figure to President Carter during the talks leading to signing of the treaty. The Backfire is primarily a naval bomber and reconnaissance aircraft, which is considered to be long-range and with intercontinental capability by Western defense analysts.

The U. S. has maintained that violation of the letter agreement would result in U. S. withdrawal from SALT 2 (Awasr June 4, p. 11).